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OCT 30 '48

WURZEL-FLUMMERY

A Comedy in One Act

BY

A. A. MILNE

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CHARACTERS

ROBERT CRAWSHAW, M.P.

MARGARET CRAWSHAW (*his wife*).

VIOLA CRAWSHAW (*his daughter*).

RICHARD MERITON, M.P.

DENIS CLIFTON.

ROBERT CRAWSHAW'S *town house (morning)*

December 698

FEB 4 1947

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Mr. Milne originally wrote *Wurzel-Flummery* in three acts. Being offered the chance of production if it were cut down to two acts, the play was produced by Mr. Dion Boucicault in the form in which it is now printed here. We also publish a version in one act and amateurs experiencing difficulty in managing the two scenes which the two-act play requires are recommended to the piece in the one-act form.

WURZEL-FLUMMERY

SCENE.—ROBERT CRAWSHAW'S town house. Morning.

It is a June day before the war in the morning-room of ROBERT CRAWSHAW'S town house. Entering it with our friend the house-agent, our attention would first be called to the delightful club fender round the fireplace. On one side of this a Chesterfield sofa comes out at right angles. In a corner of the sofa MISS VIOLA CRAWSHAW is sitting, deep in "The Times." The house-agent would hesitate to catalogue her, but we notice for ourselves, before he points out the comfortable arm-chair opposite, that she is young and pretty. In the middle of the room and facing the fireplace is (observe) a solid knee-hole writing-table, covered with papers and books of reference, and supported by a chair at the middle and another at the side. The rest of the furniture, and the books and pictures round the walls, we must leave until another time, for at this moment the door behind the sofa opens and RICHARD MERITON comes in. He looks about thirty-five, has a clean-shaven intelligent face, and is dressed in a dark tweed suit. We withdraw hastily, as he comes behind VIOLA and puts his hands over her eyes.

RICHARD. Three guesses who it is.

VIOLA (*putting her hands over his*). The Archbishop of Canterbury.

RICHARD. No.

VIOLA. The Archbishop of York.

RICHARD. Fortunately that exhausts the archbishops. Now, then, your last guess.

VIOLA. Richard Meriton, M.P.

RICHARD. Wonderful! (*He kisses the top of her head lightly and goes round to the club fender, where he sits with his back to the fireplace.*) How did you know? (*He begins to fill a pipe.*)

VIOLA (*smiling*). Well, it couldn't have been father.

RICHARD. N-no, I suppose not. Not just after breakfast anyway. Anything in the paper?

VIOLA. There's a letter from father pointing out that——

RICHARD. I never knew such a man as Robert for pointing out.

VIOLA. Anyhow, it's in big print.

RICHARD. It would be.

VIOLA. You are very cynical this morning, Dick.

RICHARD. The sausages were cold, dear.

VIOLA. Poor Dick! Oh, Dick, I wish you were on the same side as father.

RICHARD. But he's on the wrong side. Surely I've told you that before. . . . Viola, do you really think it would make a difference?

VIOLA. Well, you know what he said about you at Basingstoke the other day.

RICHARD. No, I don't, really.

VIOLA. He said that your intellectual arrogance was only equalled by your spiritual instability. I don't quite know what it means, but it doesn't sound the sort of thing you want in a son-in-law.

RICHARD. Still, it was friendly of him to go right away to Basingstoke to say it. Anyhow, you don't believe it.

VIOLA. Of course not.

RICHARD. And Robert doesn't really.

VIOLA. Then why does he say it?

RICHARD. Ah, now you're opening up very grave questions. The whole structure of the British Constitution rests upon Robert's right to say things like that at Basingstoke. . . . But really, darling, we're very good friends. He's always asking my advice about things—he doesn't take it, of course, but still he asks it; and it was awfully good of him to insist on my staying here.

while my flat was being done up. (*Seriously.*) I bless him for that. If it hadn't been for the last week I should never have known you. You were just "Viola"—the girl I'd seen at odd times since she was a child; and now—oh, why won't you let me tell your father? I hate it like this.

VIOLA. Because I love you, Dick, and because I know father. He would, as they say in novels, show you the door. (*Smiling.*) And I want you this side of the door for a little bit longer.

RICHARD (*firmly*). I shall tell him before I go.

VIOLA (*pleadingly*). But not till then; that gives us two more days. You see, darling, it's going to take me all I know to get round him. You see, apart from politics, you're so poor—and father hates poor people.

RICHARD (*viciously*). Damn money!

VIOLA (*thoughtfully*). I think that's what father means by spiritual instability.

RICHARD. Viola! (*He stands up and holds out his arms to her. She goes to him and—*) Oh, Lord, look out!

VIOLA (*reaching across to the mantelpiece*). Matches!

RICHARD. Thanks very much. (*He lights his pipe as ROBERT CRAWSHAW comes in.*)

(CRAWSHAW is forty-five, but his closely-trimmed moustache and whiskers, his inclination to stoutness, and the loud old-gentlemanly style in trousers which he affects with his morning-coat, make him look older, and, what is more important, the Pillar of the State which he undoubtedly is.)

CRAWSHAW. Good morning, Richard. Down at last?

RICHARD. Good morning. I did warn you, didn't I, that I was bad at breakfasts?

CRAWSHAW. Viola, where's your mother?

VIOLA (*making for the door*). I don't know, father; do you want her?

CRAWSHAW. I wish to speak to her.

VIOLA. All right, I'll tell her.

(*She goes out.*)

(RICHARD picks up "The Times" and sits down again.)

CRAWSHAW (*sitting down in a business-like way at his desk*). Richard, why don't you get something to do?

RICHARD. My dear fellow, I've only just finished breakfast.

CRAWSHAW. I mean generally. And apart, of course, from your—ah—work in the House.

RICHARD (*a trifle cool*). I have something to do.

CRAWSHAW. Oh, reviewing. I mean something serious. You should get a directorship or something in the City.

RICHARD. I hate the City.

CRAWSHAW. Ah! there, my dear Richard, is that intellectual arrogance to which I had to call attention the other day at Basingstoke.

RICHARD (*dryly*). Yes, so Viola was telling me.

CRAWSHAW. You understood, my dear fellow, that I meant nothing personal. (*Clearing his throat.*) It is justly one of the proudest boasts of the Englishman that his political enmities are not allowed to interfere with his private friendships.

RICHARD (*carelessly*). Oh, I shall go to Basingstoke myself one day.

(*Enter MARGARET. MARGARET has been in love with ROBERT CRAWSHAW for twenty-five years, the last twenty-four years from habit. She is small, comfortable, and rather foolish; you would certainly call her a dear, but you might sometimes call her a poor dear.*)

MARGARET. Good morning, Mr. Meriton. I do hope your breakfast was all right.

RICHARD. Excellent, thank you.

MARGARET. That's right. Did you want me, Robert?

CRAWSHAW (*obviously uncomfortable*). Yes—er—h'r'm—Richard—er—what are your—er—plans?

RICHARD. Is he trying to get rid of me, Mrs. Crawshaw?

MARGARET. Of course not. (*To ROBERT.*) Are you, dear?

CRAWSHAW. Perhaps we had better come into my room, Margaret. We can leave Richard here with the paper.

RICHARD. No, no; I'm going.

CRAWSHAW (*going to the door with him*). I have some particular business to discuss. If you aren't going out, I should like to consult you in the matter afterwards.

RICHARD. Right!

(*He goes out.*)

CRAWSHAW. Sit down, Margaret. I have some extraordinary news for you.

MARGARET (*sitting down*). Yes, Robert?

CRAWSHAW. This letter has just come by hand. (*He reads it.*) "199 Lincoln's Inn Fields. Dear Sir, I have the pleasure to inform you that under the will of the late Mr. Antony Clifton you are a beneficiary to the extent of £50,000."

MARGARET. Robert!

CRAWSHAW. Wait! "A trifling condition is attached—namely, that you should take the name of—Wurzel-Flummery."

MARGARET. Robert!

CRAWSHAW. "I have the honour to be, your obedient servant, Denis Clifton." (*He folds the letter up and puts it away.*)

MARGARET. Robert, whoever is he? I mean the one who's left you the money?

CRAWSHAW (*calmly*). I have not the slightest idea, Margaret. Doubtless we shall find out before long. I have asked Mr. Denis Clifton to come and see me.

MARGARET. Leaving you fifty thousand pounds! Just fancy!

CRAWSHAW. Wurzel-Flummery!

MARGARET. We can have the second car now, dear, can't we? And what about moving? You know you always said you ought to be in a more central part. Mr. Robert Crawshaw, M.P., of Curzon Street, sounds so much more—more Cabinety.

CRAWSHAW. Mr. Robert Wurzel-Flummery, M.P., of Curzon Street—I don't know what *that* sounds like.

MARGARET. I expect that's only a legal way of putting it, dear. They can't really expect us to change our name to—Wurzley-Fothergill.

CRAWSHAW. Wurzel-Flummery.

MARGARET. Yes, dear, didn't I say that? I am sure you could talk the solicitor round—this Mr. Denis Clifton. After all, it doesn't matter to *him* what we call ourselves. Write him one of your letters, dear.

CRAWSHAW. You don't seem to apprehend the situation, Margaret.

MARGARET. Yes, I do, dear. This Mr.—Mr.—

CRAWSHAW. Antony Clifton.

MARGARET. Yes, he's left you fifty thousand pounds, together with the name of Wurzley-Fothergill—

CRAWSHAW. Wurzel—oh, well, never mind.

MARGARET. Yes, well, you tell the solicitor that you will take the fifty thousand pounds, but you don't want the name. It's too absurd, when everybody knows of Robert Crawshaw, M.P., to expect you to call yourself Wurzley-Fothergill.

CRAWSHAW (*impatiently*). Yes, yes. The point is that this Mr. Clifton has left me the money on *condition* that I change my name. If I don't take the name, I don't take the money.

MARGARET. But is that legal?

CRAWSHAW. Perfectly. It is often done. People change their names on succeeding to some property.

MARGARET. I thought it was only when your name was Moses and you changed it to Talbot.

CRAWSHAW (*to himself*). Wurzel-Flummery!

MARGARET. I wonder why he left you the money at all. Of course it was very nice of him, but if you didn't know him— Why do you think he did, dear?

CRAWSHAW. I know no more than this letter. I suppose he had—ah—followed my career, and was—ah—interested in it, and being a man with no relations, felt that he could—ah—safely leave this money to me. No doubt Wurzel-Flummery was his mother's maiden

name, or the name of some other friend even dearer to him; he wished the name—ah—perpetuated, perhaps even recorded not unworthily in the history of our country, and—ah—made this will accordingly. In a way it is a kind of—ah—sacred trust.

MARGARET. Then, of course, you'll accept it, dear?

CRAWSHAW. It requires some consideration. I have my career to think about, my duty to my country.

MARGARET. Of course, dear. Money is a great help in politics, isn't it?

CRAWSHAW. Money wisely spent is a help in any profession. The view of riches which socialists and suchlike people profess to take is entirely ill-considered. A rich man, who spends his money thoughtfully, is serving his country as nobly as anybody.

MARGARET. Yes, dear. Then you think we *could* have that second car and the house in Curzon Street?

CRAWSHAW. We must not be led away. Fifty thousand pounds, properly invested, is only two thousand a year. When you have deducted the income-tax—and the tax on unearned income is extremely high just now——

MARGARET. Oh, but surely if we have to call ourselves Wurzel-Flummery it would count as *earned* income.

CRAWSHAW. I fear not. Strictly speaking, all money is earned. Even if it is left to you by another, it is presumably left to you in recognition of certain outstanding qualities which you possess. But Parliament takes a different view. I do not for a moment say that fifty thousand pounds would not be welcome. Fifty thousand pounds is certainly not to be sneezed at——

MARGARET. I should think not, indeed!

CRAWSHAW (*unconsciously rising from his chair*). And without this preposterous condition attached I should be pleased to accept this trust, and I would endeavour, Mr. Speaker—— (*He sits down again suddenly.*) I would endeavour, Margaret, to carry it out to the best of my poor ability. But—Wurzel-Flummery!

MARGARET. You would soon get used to it, dear. I

had to get used to the name of Crawshaw after I had been Debenham for twenty-five years. It is surprising how quickly it comes to you. I think I only signed my name Margaret Debenham once after I was married.

CRAWSHAW (*kindly*). The cases are rather different, Margaret. Naturally a woman, who from her cradle looks forward to the day when she will change her name, cannot have this feeling for the—ah—honour of his name, which every man—ah—feels. Such a feeling is naturally more present in my own case since I have been privileged to make the name of Crawshaw in some degree—ah—well-known, I might almost say famous.

MARGARET (*wistfully*). I used to be called “the beautiful Miss Debenham of Leamington.” Everybody in Leamington knew of me. Of course, I am very proud to be Mrs. Robert Crawshaw.

CRAWSHAW (*getting up and walking over to the fireplace*). In a way it would mean beginning all over again. It is half the battle in politics to get your name before the public. “Whoever is this man Wurzel-Flummery?” people will say.

MARGARET. Anyhow, dear, let us look on the bright side. Fifty thousand pounds is fifty thousand pounds.

CRAWSHAW. It is, Margaret. And no doubt it is my duty to accept it. But—well, all I say is that a *gentleman* would have left it without any conditions. Or at least he would merely have expressed his *wish* that I should take the name, without going so far as to enforce it. Then I could have looked at the matter all round in an impartial spirit.

MARGARET (*pursuing her thoughts*). The linen is marked R. M. C. now. Of course, we should have to have that altered. Do you think R. M. F. would do, or would it have to be R. M. W. hyphen F.?

CRAWSHAW. What? Oh—yes, there will be a good deal of that to attend to. (*Going up to her*.) I think, Margaret, I had better talk to Richard about this. Of course, it would be absurd to refuse the money, but—well, I should like to have his opinion.

MARGARET (*getting up*). Do you think he would be

very sympathetic, dear? He makes jokes about serious things—like bishops and hunting—just as if they weren't at all serious.

CRAWSHAW. I wish to talk to him just to obtain a new—ah—point of view. I do not hold myself in the least bound to act on anything he says. I regard him as a constituent, Margaret.

MARGARET. Then I will send him to you.

CRAWSHAW (*putting his hands on her shoulders*). Margaret, what do you really feel about it?

MARGARET. Just whatever you feel, Robert.

CRAWSHAW (*kissing her*). Thank you, Margaret; you are a good wife to me.

(*She goes out.*)

(CRAWSHAW goes to his desk and selects a "Who's Who" from a little pile of reference-books on it. He walks round to his chair, sits down in it and begins to turn the pages, murmuring names beginning with "C" to himself as he gets near the place. When he finds it, he murmurs "Clifton—that's funny," and closes the book. Evidently the publishers have failed him.)

(*Enter RICHARD.*)

RICHARD. Well, what's the news? (*He goes to his old seat on the fender.*) Been left a fortune?

CRAWSHAW (*simply*). Yes. . . . By a Mr. Antony Clifton. I never met him, and I know nothing about him.

RICHARD (*surprised*). Not really? Well, I congratulate you. (*He sighs.*) To them that hath— But what on earth do you want my advice about?

CRAWSHAW. There is a slight condition attached.

RICHARD. Oho!

CRAWSHAW. The condition is that with this money—fifty thousand pounds—I take the name of—ah—Wurzel-Flummery.

RICHARD (*jumping up*). What!

CRAWSHAW (*sulkily*). I said it quite distinctly—Wurzel-Flummery.

(RICHARD *in an awed silence walks over to the desk and stands looking down at the unhappy CRAWSHAW. He throws out his left hand as if introducing him.*)

RICHARD (*reverently*). Mr. Robert Wurzel-Flummery, M.P., one of the most prominent of our younger Parliamentarians. Oh, you . . . oh! . . . oh, how too heavenly! (*He goes back to his seat, looks up and catches CRAWSHAW'S eye, and breaks down altogether.*)

CRAWSHAW (*rising with dignity*). Shall we discuss it seriously, or shall we leave it?

RICHARD. How can we discuss a name like Wurzel-Flummery seriously? "Mr. Wurzel-Flummery in a few well-chosen words seconded the motion." . . . "Sir, went on Mr. Wurzel-Flummery"— Oh, poor Robert!

CRAWSHAW (*sitting down sulkily*). You seem quite certain that I shall take the money.

RICHARD. I am quite certain.

CRAWSHAW. Would you take it?

RICHARD (*hesitating*). Well—I wonder.

CRAWSHAW. After all, as William Shakespeare says, "What's in a name?"

RICHARD. I can tell you something else that Shakespeare — William Shakespeare — said. (*Dramatically rising.*) Who steals my purse with fifty thousand in it—steals trash. (*In his natural voice.*) Trash, Robert. (*Dramatically again.*) But he who filches from me my good name of Crawshaw (*lightly*) and substitutes the rotten one of Wurzel—

CRAWSHAW (*annoyed*). As a matter of fact, Wurzel-Flummery is a very good old name. I seem to remember some—ah—Hampshire Wurzel-Flummeries. It is a very laudable spirit on the part of a dying man to wish to—ah—perpetuate these old English names. It all seems to me quite natural and straightforward. If I take this money I shall have nothing to be ashamed of.

RICHARD. I see. . . . Look here, may I ask you a few questions? I should like to know just how you feel about the whole business?

CRAWSHAW (*complacently folding his hands*). Go ahead.

RICHARD. Suppose a stranger came up in the street to you and said, "My poor man, here's five pounds for you," what would you do? Tell him to go to the devil, I suppose, wouldn't you?

CRAWSHAW (*humorously*). In more parliamentary language, perhaps, Richard. I should tell him I never took money from strangers.

RICHARD. Quite so; but that if it were ten thousand pounds, you would take it?

CRAWSHAW. I most certainly shouldn't.

RICHARD. But if he died and left it to you, *then* you would?

CRAWSHAW (*blandly*). Ah, I thought you were leading up to that. That, of course, is entirely different.

RICHARD. Why?

CRAWSHAW. Well—ah—wouldn't *you* take ten thousand pounds if it were left to you by a stranger?

RICHARD. I dare say I should. But I should like to know why it would seem different.

CRAWSHAW (*professionally*). Ha—hum! Well—in the first place, when a man is dead he wants his money no longer. You can therefore be certain that you are not taking anything from him which he cannot spare. And in the next place, it is the man's dying wish that you should have the money. To refuse would be to refuse the dead. To accept becomes almost a sacred duty.

RICHARD. It really comes to this, doesn't it? You won't take it from him when he's alive, because if you did, you couldn't decently refuse him a little gratitude; but you know that it doesn't matter a damn to him what happens to his money after he's dead, and therefore you can take it without feeling any gratitude at all.

CRAWSHAW. No, I shouldn't put it like that.

RICHARD (*smiling*). I'm sure you wouldn't, Robert.

CRAWSHAW. No doubt you can twist it about so that—

RICHARD. All right, we'll leave that and go on to the next point. Suppose a perfect stranger offered you

five pounds to part your hair down the middle, shave off your moustache, and wear only one whisker—if he met you suddenly in the street, seemed to dislike your appearance, took out a fiver and begged you to hurry off and alter yourself—of course you'd pocket the money and go straight to your barber's?

CRAWSHAW. Now you are merely being offensive.

RICHARD. I beg your pardon. I should have said that if he had left you five pounds in his will?—well, then twenty pounds?—a hundred pounds?—a thousand pounds?—fifty thousand pounds?— (Jumping up excitedly.) It's only a question of price—fifty thousand pounds, Robert—a pink tie with purple spots, hair parted across the back, trousers with a patch in the seat, call myself Wurzel-Flummery—any old thing you like, you can't insult me—anything you like, gentlemen, for fifty thousand pounds. (Lowering his voice.) Only you must leave it in your will, and then I can feel that it is a sacred duty—a sacred duty, my lords and gentlemen. (He sinks back into the sofa and relights his pipe.)

CRAWSHAW (rising with dignity). It is evidently useless to prolong this conversation.

RICHARD (waving him down again). No, no, Robert; I've finished. I just took the other side—and I got carried away. I ought to have been at the Bar.

CRAWSHAW. You take such extraordinary views of things. You must look facts in the face, Richard. This is a modern world, and we are modern people living in it. Take the matter-of-fact view. You may like or dislike the name of—ah—Wurzel-Flummery, but you can't get away from the fact that fifty thousand pounds is not to be sneezed at.

RICHARD (wistfully). I don't know why people shouldn't sneeze at money sometimes. I should like to start a society for sneezing at fifty thousand pounds. We'd have to begin in a small way, of course; we'd begin by sneezing at five pounds—and work up. . . . The trouble is that we're all inoculated in our cradles against that kind of cold.



CRAWSHAW (*pleasantly*). You will have your little joke. But you know as well as I do that it is only a joke. There can be no serious reason why I should not take this money. And I—ah—gather that you don't think it will affect my career?

RICHARD (*carelessly*). Not a bit. It'll help it. It'll get you into all the comic papers.

(MARGARET comes in at this moment, to the relief of CRAWSHAW, who is not quite certain if he is being flattered or insulted again.)

MARGARET. Well, have you told him?

RICHARD (*making way for her on the sofa*). I have heard the news, Mrs. Crawshaw. And I have told Robert my opinion that he should have no difficulty in making the name of Wurzel-Flummery as famous as he has already made that of Crawshaw. At any rate I hope he will.

MARGARET. How nice of you!

CRAWSHAW. Well, it's settled, then. (*Looking at his watch*.) This solicitor fellow should be here soon. Perhaps, after all, we can manage something about— Ah, Viola, did you want your mother?

(*Enter VIOLA.*)

VIOLA. Sorry, do I interrupt a family meeting? There's Richard, so it can't be very serious.

RICHARD. What a reputation!

CRAWSHAW. Well, it's over now.

MARGARET. Viola had better know, hadn't she?

CRAWSHAW. She'll have to know some time, of course.

VIOLA (*sitting down firmly on the sofa*). Of course she will. So you'd better tell her now. I knew there was something exciting going on this morning.

CRAWSHAW (*embarrassed*). Hum—ha—— (*To MARGARET*.) Perhaps you'd better tell her, dear.

MARGARET (*simply and naturally*). Father has come into some property, Viola. It means changing our name unfortunately. But your father doesn't think it will matter.

VIOLA. How thrilling! What is the name, mother?

MARGARET. Your father says it is—dear me, I shall never remember it.

CRAWSHAW (*mumbling*). Wurzel-Flummery.

VIOLA (*after a pause*). Dick, you tell me, if nobody else will.

RICHARD. Robert said it just now.

VIOLA. That wasn't a name, was it? I thought it was just a—do say it again, father.

CRAWSHAW (*sulkily but plainly*). Wurzel-Flummery.

VIOLA (*surprised*). Do you spell it like that? I mean like a wurzel and like flummery?

RICHARD. Exactly, I believe.

VIOLA (*to herself*). Miss Viola Wurzel-Flummery—I mean they'd have to look at you, wouldn't they? (*Bubbling over.*) Oh, Dick, what a heavenly name! Who had it first?

RICHARD. They are an old Hampshire family—that is so, isn't it, Robert?

CRAWSHAW (*annoyed*). I said I thought that I remembered—Margaret, can you find Burke there?

(*She finds it, and he buries himself in the families of the great.*)

MARGARET. Well, Viola, you haven't told us how you like being Miss Wurzel-Flummery.

VIOLA. I haven't realized myself yet, mummy. I shall have to stand in front of my glass and tell myself who I am.

RICHARD. It's all right for *you*. You know you'll change your name one day, and then it won't matter what you've been called before.

VIOLA (*secretly*). H'sh! (*She smiles lovingly at him, and then says aloud*) Oh, won't it? It's got to appear in the papers, "A marriage has been arranged between Miss Viola Wurzel-Flummery . . ." and everybody will say, "And about time too, poor girl."

MARGARET (*to CRAWSHAW*). Have you found it, dear?

CRAWSHAW (*resentfully*). This is the 1912 edition.

MARGARET. Still, dear, if it's a very old family, it ought to be in by then.

VIOLA. I don't mind how old it is ; I think it's lovely. Oh, Dick, what fun it will be being announced ! Just think of the footman throwing open the door and saying——

MAID (*announcing*). Mr. Denis Clifton.

(*There is a little natural confusion as CLIFTON enters jauntily in his summer suiting with a bundle of papers under his arm. CRAWSHAW goes towards him and shakes hands.*)

CRAWSHAW. How do you do, Mr. Clifton ? Very good of you to come. (*Looking doubtfully at his clothes.*) Er—it is Mr. Denis Clifton, the solicitor ?

CLIFTON (*cheerfully*). It is. I must apologize for not looking the part more, but my clothes did not arrive from Clarkson's in time. Very careless of them when they had promised. And my clerk dissuaded me from the side-whiskers which I keep by me for these occasions.

CRAWSHAW (*bewildered*). Ah, yes, quite so. But you have—ah—full legal authority to act in this matter ?

CLIFTON. Oh, decidedly. Oh, there's no question of that.

CRAWSHAW (*introducing*). My wife and daughter. (*CLIFTON bows gracefully.*) My friend. Mr. Richard Meriton.

CLIFTON (*happily*). Dear me ! Mr. Meriton too ! This is quite a situation, as we say in the profession.

RICHARD (*amused by him*). In the legal profession ?

CLIFTON. In the theatrical profession. (*Turning to MARGARET.*) I am a writer of plays, Mrs. Crawshaw. I am not giving away a professional secret when I tell you that most of the managers in London have thanked me for submitting my work to them.

CRAWSHAW (*firmly*). I understood, Mr. Clifton, that you were the solicitor employed to wind up the affairs of the late Mr. Antony Clifton.

CLIFTON. Oh, certainly. Oh, there's no doubt about my being a solicitor. My clerk, a man of the utmost

integrity, not to say probity, would give me a reference. I am in the books; I belong to the Law Society. But my heart turns elsewhere. Officially I have embraced the profession of a solicitor— (*Frankly, to MRS. CRAWSHAW.*) But you know what these official embraces are.

MARGARET. I'm afraid— (*She turns to her husband for assistance.*)

CLIFTON (*to RICHARD*). Unofficially, Mr. Meriton, I am wedded to the Muses.

VIOLA. Dick, isn't he lovely?

CRAWSHAW. Quite so. But just for the moment, Mr. Clifton, I take it that we are concerned with legal business. Should I ever wish to produce a play, the case would be different.

CLIFTON. Admirably put. Pray regard me entirely as the solicitor for as long as you wish. (*He puts his hat down on a chair with the papers in it, and taking off his gloves, goes on dreamily*) Mr. Denis Clifton was superb as a solicitor. In spite of an indifferent make-up, his manner of taking off his gloves and dropping them into his hat— (*He does so.*)

MARGARET (*to CRAWSHAW*). I think, perhaps, Viola and I—

RICHARD (*making a move too*). We'll leave you to your business, Robert.

CLIFTON (*holding up his hand*). Just one moment if I may. I have a letter for you, Mr. Meriton.

RICHARD (*surprised*). For me?

CLIFTON. Yes. My clerk, a man of the utmost integrity—oh, but I said that before—he took it round to your rooms this morning, but found only painters and decorators there. (*He is feeling in his pockets and now brings the letter out.*) I brought it along, hoping that Mr. Crawshaw—but of course I never expected anything so delightful as this. (*He hands over the letter with a bow.*)

RICHARD. Thanks. (*He puts it in his pocket.*)

CLIFTON. Oh, but do read it now, won't you? (*To MRS. CRAWSHAW.*) One so rarely has an opportunity

of being present when one's own letters are read. I think the habit they have on the stage of reading letters aloud to each other is such a very delightful one.

(RICHARD, *with a smile and a shrug, has opened his letter while CLIFTON is talking.*)

RICHARD. Good Lord!

VIOLA. Dick, what is it?

RICHARD (*reading*). "199 Lincoln's Inn Fields. Dear Sir, I have the pleasure to inform you that under the will of the late Mr. Antony Clifton you are a beneficiary to the extent of £50,000."

VIOLA. Dick!

RICHARD. "A trifling condition is attached—namely, that you should take the name of—Wurzel-Flummery."

(CLIFTON, *with his hand on his heart, bows gracefully from one to the other of them.*)

CRAWSHAW (*annoyed*). Impossible! Why should he leave any money to *you*?

VIOLA. Dick! How wonderful!

MARGARET (*mildly*). I don't remember ever having had a morning quite like this.

RICHARD (*angrily*). Is this a joke, Mr. Clifton?

CLIFTON. Oh, the money is there all right. My clerk, a man of the utmost—

RICHARD. Then I refuse it. I'll have nothing to do with it. I won't even argue about it. (*Tearing the letter into bits.*) That's what I think of your money.

(*He stalks indignantly from the room.*)

VIOLA. Dick! Oh, but, mother, he mustn't. Oh, I must tell him—

(*She hurries after him.*)

MARGARET (*with dignity*). Really, Mr. Clifton, I'm surprised at you.

(*She goes out too.*)

CLIFTON (*looking round the room*). And now, Mr. Crawshaw, we are alone.

CRAWSHAW. Yes. Well, I think, Mr. Clifton, you have a good deal to explain——

CLIFTON. My dear sir, I'm longing to begin. I have been looking forward to this day for weeks. I spent over an hour this morning dressing for it. (*He takes papers from his hat and moves to the sofa.*) Perhaps I had better begin from the beginning.

CRAWSHAW (*interested, indicating the papers*). The documents in the case?

CLIFTON. Oh dear, no—just something to carry in the hand. It makes one look more like a solicitor. (*Reading the title,*) “Watherston v. Towser—in re Great Missenden Canal Company.” My clerk invents the titles; it keeps him busy. He is very fond of Towser; Towser is always coming in. (*Frankly*) You see, Mr. Crawshaw, this is my first real case, and I only got it because Antony Clifton is my uncle. My efforts to introduce a little picturesqueness into the dull formalities of the law do not meet with that response that one would have expected.

CRAWSHAW (*looking at his watch*). Yes. Well, I'm a busy man, and if you could tell me as shortly as possible why your uncle left this money to me, and apparently to Mr. Meriton too, under these extraordinary conditions, I shall be obliged to you.

CLIFTON. Say no more, Mr. Crawshaw; I look forward to being entirely frank with you. It will be a pleasure.

CRAWSHAW. You understand, of course, my position. I think I may say that I am not without reputation in the country; and proud as I am to accept this sacred trust, this money which the late Mr. Antony Clifton has seen fit—(*modestly*) one cannot say why—to bequeath to me, yet the use of the name Wurzel-Flummery would be excessively awkward.

CLIFTON (*cheerfully*). Excessively.

CRAWSHAW. My object in seeing you was to inquire if it was absolutely essential that the name should go with the money.

CLIFTON. Well (*thoughtfully*), you may have the name

without the money if you like. But you must have the name.

CRAWSHAW (*disappointed*). Ah! (*Bravely*.) Of course, I have nothing against the name, a good old Hampshire name——

CLIFTON (*shocked*). My dear Mr. Crawshaw, you didn't think—you really didn't think that anybody had been called Wurzel-Flummery before? Oh no, no. You and Mr. Meriton were to be the first, the founders of the clan, the designers of the Wurzel-Flummery sporan——

CRAWSHAW. What do you mean, sir? Are you telling me that it is not a real name at all?

CLIFTON. Oh, it's a name all right. I know it is because—er—I made it up.

CRAWSHAW (*outraged*). And you have the impudence to propose, sir, that I should take a made-up name?

CLIFTON (*soothingly*). Well, all names are made up some time or other. Somebody had to think of—Adam.

CRAWSHAW. I warn you, Mr. Clifton, that I do not allow this trifling with serious subjects.

CLIFTON. It's all so simple, really. . . . You see, my Uncle Antony was a rather unusual man. He despised money. He was not afraid to put it in its proper place. The place he put it in was—er—a little below golf and a little above classical concerts. If a man said to him, "Would you like to make fifty thousand this afternoon?" he would say—well, it would depend what he was doing. If he were going to have a round at Walton Heath——

CRAWSHAW. It's perfectly scandalous to talk of money in this way.

CLIFTON. Well, that's how he talked about it. But he didn't find many to agree with him. In fact, he used to say that there was nothing, however contemptible, that a man would not do for money. One day I suggested that if he left a legacy with a sufficiently foolish name attached to it, somebody might be found to refuse it. He laughed at the idea. That put me on my mettle. "Two people," I said; "leave the same

silly name to two people, two well-known people, rival politicians, say, men whose own names are already public property. Surely they wouldn't both take it." That touched him. "Denis, my boy, you've got it," he said. "Upon what vile bodies shall we experiment?" We decided on you and Mr. Meriton. The next thing was to choose the name. I started on the wrong lines. I began by suggesting names like Porker, Tosh, Bugge, Spiffkins—the obvious sort. My uncle——

CRAWSHAW (*boiling with indignation*). How dare you discuss me with your uncle, sir! How dare you decide in this cold-blooded way whether I am to be called—ah—Tosh—or—ah—Porker!

CLIFTON. My uncle wouldn't hear of Tosh or Porker. He wanted a humorous name—a name he could roll lovingly round his tongue—a name expressing a sort of humorous contempt—Wurzel-Flummery! I can see now the happy ruminating smile which came so often on my Uncle Antony's face in those latter months. He was thinking of his two Wurzel-Flummerys. I remember him saying once—it was at the Zoo—what a pity it was he hadn't enough to divide among the whole Cabinet. A whole bunch of Wurzel-Flummerys; it would have been rather jolly.

CRAWSHAW. You force me to say, sir, that if *that* was the way you and your uncle used to talk together at the Zoo, his death can only be described as a merciful intervention of Providence.

CLIFTON. Oh, but I think he must be enjoying all this somewhere, you know. I hope he is. He would have loved this morning. It was his one regret that from the necessities of the case he could not live to enjoy his own joke; but he had hopes that echoes of it would reach him wherever he might be. It was with some such idea, I fancy, that toward the end he became interested in spiritualism.

CRAWSHAW (*rising solemnly*). Mr. Clifton, I have no interest in the present whereabouts of your uncle, nor in what means he has of overhearing a private conversation between you and myself. But if, as you irrever-

ently suggest, he is listening to us, I should like him to hear this. That, in my opinion, you are not a qualified solicitor at all, that you never had an uncle, and that the whole story of the will and the ridiculous condition attached to it is just the tomfool joke of a man who, by his own admission, wastes most of his time writing unsuccessful farces. And I propose—

CLIFTON. Pardon my interrupting. But you said farces. Not farces, comedies—of a whimsical nature.

CRAWSHAW. Whatever they were, sir, I propose to report the whole matter to the Law Society. And you know your way out, sir.

CLIFTON. Then I am to understand that you refuse the legacy, Mr. Crawshaw?

CRAWSHAW (*startled*). What's that?

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CLIFTON. I am to understand that you refuse the fifty thousand pounds?

CRAWSHAW. If the money is really there, I most certainly do not refuse it.

CLIFTON. Oh, the money is most certainly there—and the name. Both waiting for you.

CRAWSHAW (*thumping the table*). Then, sir, I accept them. I feel it my duty to accept them, as a public expression of confidence in the late Mr. Clifton's motives. I repudiate entirely the motives that you have suggested to him, and I consider it a sacred duty to show what I think of your story by accepting the trust which he has bequeathed to me. You will arrange further matters with my solicitor. Good morning, sir.

CLIFTON (*to himself as he rises*). Mr. Crawshaw here drank a glass of water. (*To CRAWSHAW*) Mr. Wurzel-Flummery, farewell. May I express the parting wish that your future career will add fresh lustre to—my name. (*To himself as he goes out*) Exit Mr. Denis Clifton with dignity. (*But he has left his papers behind him.*)

(CRAWSHAW, walking indignantly back to the sofa, sees the papers and picks them up.)

CRAWSHAW (*contemptuously*). "Watherston & Towser

—*in re* Great Missenden Canal Company.” Bah! (*He tears them up and throws them into the fire. He goes back to his writing-table and is seated there as VIOLA, followed by MERITON, comes in.*)

VIOLA. Father, Dick doesn't want to take the money, but I have told him that of course he must. He must, mustn't he?

RICHARD. We needn't drag Robert into it, Viola.

CRAWSHAW. If Richard has the very natural feeling that it would be awkward for me if there were two Wurzel-Flummerys in the House of Commons, I should be the last to interfere with his decision. In any case, I don't see what concern it is of yours, Viola.

VIOLA (*surprised*). But how can we get married if he doesn't take the money?

CRAWSHAW (*hardly understanding*). Married? What does this mean, Richard?

RICHARD. I'm sorry it has come out like this. We ought to have told you before, but anyhow we were going to have told you in a day or two. Viola and I want to get married.

CRAWSHAW. And what did you want to get married on?

RICHARD (*with a smile*). Not very much, I'm afraid.

VIOLA. We're all right now, father, because we shall have fifty thousand pounds.

RICHARD (*sadly*). Oh, Viola, Viola!

CRAWSHAW. But naturally this puts a very different complexion on matters.

VIOLA. So of course he must take it, mustn't he, father?

CRAWSHAW. I can hardly suppose, Richard, that you expect me to entrust my daughter to a man who is so little provident for himself that he throws away fifty thousand pounds because of some fanciful objection to the name which goes with it.

RICHARD (*in despair*). You don't understand, Robert.

CRAWSHAW. I understand this, Richard. That if the name is good enough for me, it should be good enough for you. You don't mind asking Viola to take *your*

name, but you consider it an insult if you are asked to take *my* name.

RICHARD (*miserably to VIOLA*). Do you want to be Mrs. Wurzel-Flummery?

VIOLA. Well, I'm going to be Miss Wurzel-Flummery anyhow, darling.

RICHARD (*beaten*). Heaven help me! you'll make me take it. But you'll never understand.

CRAWSHAW (*stopping to administer comfort to him on his way out*). Come, come, Richard. (*Patting him on the shoulder.*) I understand perfectly. All that you were saying about money a little while ago—it's all perfectly true, it's all just what I feel myself. But in practice we have to make allowances sometimes. We have to sacrifice our ideals for—ah—others. I shall be very proud to have you for a son-in-law, and to feel that there will be the two of us in Parliament together upholding the honour of the—ah—name. And perhaps now that we are to be so closely related, you may come to feel some day that your views could be—ah—more adequately put forward from *my* side of the House.

RICHARD. Go on, Robert; I deserve it.

CRAWSHAW. Well, well! Margaret will be interested in our news. And you must send that solicitor a line—or perhaps a telephone message would be better. (*He goes to the door and turns round just as he is going out.*) Yes, I think the telephone, Richard; it would be safer.

(*Exit.*)

RICHARD (*holding out his hands to VIOLA*). Come here, Mrs. Wurzel-Flummery.

VIOLA. Not Mrs. Wurzel-Flummery; Mrs. Dick. And soon, please, darling. (*She comes to him.*)

RICHARD (*shaking his head sadly at her*). I don't know what I've done, Viola. (*Suddenly.*) But you're worth it. (*He kisses her, and then says in a low voice.*) And God help me if I ever stop thinking so!

(*Enter MR. DENIS CLIFTON. He sees them, and walks about very tactfully with his back towards them, humming to himself.*)

RICHARD. Hullo !

CLIFTON (*to himself*). Now where did I put those papers ? (*He hums to himself again.*) Now where—oh, I beg your pardon ! I left some papers behind.

VIOLA. Dick, you'll tell him. (*As she goes out, she says to CLIFTON.*) Good-bye, Mr. Clifton, and thank you for writing such nice letters.

CLIFTON. Good-bye, Miss Crawshaw.

VIOLA. Just say it to see how it sounds.

CLIFTON. Good-bye, Miss Wurzel-Flummery.

VIOLA (*smiling happily*). No, not Miss, *Mrs.*

(*She goes out.*)

CLIFTON (*looking in surprise from her to him*). You don't mean—

RICHARD. Yes ; and I'm taking the money after all, Mr. Clifton.

CLIFTON. Dear me, what a situation ! (*Thoughtfully to himself.*) I wonder how a rough scenario would strike the managers.

RICHARD. Poor Mr. Clifton !

CLIFTON. Why poor ?

RICHARD. You missed all the best part. You didn't hear what I said to Crawshaw about money before you came.

CLIFTON (*thoughtfully*). Oh ! was it very— (*Brightening up.*) But I expect Uncle Antony heard. (*After a pause.*) Well, I must be getting on. I wonder if you've noticed any important papers lying about, in connection with the Great Missenden Canal Company—a most intricate case, in which my clerk and I— (*He has murmured himself across to the fireplace, and the fragments of his important case suddenly catch his eye. He picks up one of the fragments.*) Ah, yes. Well, I shall tell my clerk that we lost the case. He will be sorry. He had got quite fond of that canal. (*He turns to go, but first says to MERITON.*) So you're taking the money, Mr. Meriton ?

RICHARD. Yes.

CLIFTON. And Mr. Crawshaw too !

RICHARD. Yes.

CLIFTON (*to himself as he goes out*). They are both taking it. (*He stops and looks up to UNCLE ANTONY with a smile.*) Good old Uncle Antony—he knew—he knew

(MERITON *stands watching him as he goes.*)

